

# Boyhood Memories

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Morris Lesser isn't sure whether it was 1891 or 1892 that he witnessed the laying of the cornerstone of the Macdonough Theater, but one thing he is sure of. Frederick Ward, the great Shakespearean actor of the day, was the man who laid the stone. "It came to mind the other day as I strolled past Broadway at 14th Street. I remember the occasion called for a school holiday and we kids at Durant School attended the ceremony under the watchful eyes of our teacher. After witnessing the ceremony we journeyed to the First Congregational Church at 12th and Clay Streets to hear a talk by the great Mr. Ward. The Macdonough building had two entrances, one as at present on 14th Street and another on Broadway. The Broadway entrance led to offices housing lawyers and doctors. My life-long friend, Dr. Henry B. Mehrmann, later Alameda County coroner, had offices in the building."

—THE KNAVE

# Wreckers Doom Famed Old Oakland Playhouse

By AL MARTINEZ

When the Henshaw Building at 14th St. and Broadway is demolished to make way for a new structure, the physical remains of a plush theatrical era will die with it.

The old building once housed the lavish Macdonough Theater, one of Oakland's first legitimate stages, which presented the talents of world-famous performers.

It was built in the gaslight era of tandem bicycles and gingerbread houses. It is being destroyed to make way for a modern, multi-storied structure.

The four-story building, constructed by Joseph Macdonough, went up in 1891-92. It was a major structure in a growing city, complete with a dome on top, and housing stores and offices as well as the theater.

Frederick Warde, a great tragedian of his time, laid the cornerstone. Uniformed policemen joined the ceremonies, and the people gathered to watch the event.

The theater, first "downstairs

theater" in the city, was built to seat approximately 1,400. It was described as the last word in luxury, a "red plush" playhouse.

George P. Clark, a ticket salesman at the old Macdonough and still an Oakland resident, was present the day the building cornerstone was laid.

The Duff Opera Co., he recalls, performed light operas in the opening weeks of the theater.

With Charles P. Hall as manager, the Macdonough catered to the "carriage trade" and featured nationally-known stars. Ethel Barrymore, the great Caruso, Maude Adams and others appeared here, bowing to capacity crowds.

The showhouse presented variety also, from ventriloquists to recitals, symphonies and ballets.

It was the stop-over location for touring companies, bringing to Oakland the popular productions of the day.

The name of the theater

changed through the years: from the Macdonough to the Crane Wilbur Playhouse (named after an actor) to the State, the Vitaphone and finally the State again, the name with which it died.

The Macdonough remained a dominant force in Oakland theatricals until the appearance in 1904 of Ye Liberty Playhouse in the same area.

Shortly after the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, the building was purchased by William G. Henshaw, and its name was changed to the Henshaw Building.

The theater carried on successfully until the approach of World War I, fighting competition offered by three other legitimate theaters.

The Macdonough was wired for sound as the motion pictures made their impact felt in the entertainment world. It was "dedicated" to sound pictures and renamed the Vitaphone.

Even then it prospered. It was in the Vitaphone Al Jolson appeared in the phenomenal first-run "Jazz Singer" and later in

"Sonny Boy."

The building changed hands in 1928 when it was purchased by the Bank of Italy, now the Bank of America. The Capital Company, a subsidiary of Transamerica, later took over ownership and today engineers its doom.

As the State Theater, the old Macdonough was a movie house until it finally closed in 1945.

The Henshaw Building was at one time to be the Metropolitan Oakland area headquarters for the bank. Then there were plans to turn it into a \$2,500,000 hotel.

Today, there is no doubt as to its future. Demolition has already started. A new, 12-story office and store building will

take the place of what once housed the Macdonough, the playhouse of great stars.

## Footlights Glimmer

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WHENEVER Frank Carey gets near Broadway and 14th his mind flashes back to those glamorous days when the Macdonough Theater drew box office crowds to that vicinity.

"Every now and then," he recalls, "the flashing lights of New York's great Broadway would glimmer on Oakland's Broadway and we would have the opportunity

of seeing the world's outstanding theatrical productions. Some for just one night, others for a week. Plays like 'Prince of Pilsen' or Jefferson De Angeles in the 'Royal Rogue.'

"Even 'Ben Hur' with all its elaborate settings and stage effects. Who can forget the chariot race as portrayed on the stage. They had a platform mounted on rollers so the horses would gallop as if they were in the arena.

"A play entitled 'In Old Kentucky' was another requiring considerable equipment. It included a horse race and a full Pickaninny band. Those Negro lads played music that would equal Sousa or Gilmore. The story was about a plantation on which the mortgage was

due, and it was springtime.

"Crops were bad, and the problem of how to raise money made for exciting melodrama. The lovely Alice Brady played the role of Madge. It was suggested during a family discussion that they enter Queen Bess, their thoroughbred, in the Kentucky Derby. But who was to ride? Why, Madge, of course. She rides Queen Bess all the time. Cut her hair and give her a jockey's suit.

"The excitement was too much for the old Kentucky colonel. Not having enough money to buy a ticket to the race, he persuaded two boys to let him share the knothole they were monopolizing.

"The race was quite a scene. Madge won and the plantation was saved."

Before the race even started the old Colonel went to the leader of the band and told him 'If Queen Bess wins, play Dixie as you never played before. If she loses, play 'Massa's in the Cold, Cold Ground'."

The curtain went down with the band playing Dixie.

That was the Macdonough in the Gay '90s.

—THE KNAVE



# MACDONOUGH THEATRE

PROGRAM—continued

Monday, December 31, 1900 and Tuesday, January 1, 1901—Matinee New Years Day.

## Primrose & Dockstader's Great American Minstrels

### PART I.

Grand opening Overture by Prof. Carlton's Band and L. J. Latham's Superb Orchestra, including the Wizard of the Baton, Johny Whalen.

#### VOCAL

Charles Kent	George Trewellyn	Si Merritt	Harry Ellis
Frederick Barnes	Ed. Bogart	Ed. Hopkins	Charles D. Warren
	Walter Vaughn	James B. Bradley	

#### FIRST EDITION OF END MEN

NEIL O'BRIEN, Bones      LARRY DOOLEY, Tambo  
CHARLES KENT, Interlocutor

"Oh, Answer Me".....	Walter Vaughn
"When the Harvest Days Are Over".....	James B. Bradley
"If I Only Had a Dollar of My Own".....	Neil O'Brien
"Just to Remind Me of You".....	Charles Kent
"K-I-S-S".....	Larry Dooley

#### SECOND EDITION OF END MEN

GEORGE PRIMROSE      LEW DOCKSTADER

"How Would You Like to Fondle Me?".....	George Primrose
"Song of Songs".....	Frederick Barnes
"Asleep in the Deep".....	Lew Dockstader
"Its Set Them All a Thinking".....	
"It's Up to Me".....	

### PART II.

#### THE CHOIR BOY'S DREAM

The Grandest Scenic and Electric Production Ever Seen in Minstrelsy.  
JAMES B. BRADLEY, Soloist.

The Singing Comedians,

LARRY DOOLEY & CHARLES KENT

The De Reszkes of Minstrelsy.

LEW DOCKSTADER

Will Interfere at this Point.

GEORGE PRIMROSE

In His Latest Characteristic and Scenic Creation, "Sunny, Sunny South."  
First Scene—Morning, noon and night on Mississippi Bayou. Second Scene—Morning noon and night, Tennessee cotton field. Introducing his great singing successes, "Louisiana Lize," "When the Moon Comes Up Behind the Hills," his famous dance and dancing midgets.

The Eccentric Comedians,

ED.-BOGART & O'BRIEN-NEIL

In Novelties of their Own Creation. Mr. O'Brien will Sing His Original Song, "Lucy Lee."

The World's Greatest Acrobats,

5-THE CARL DAMMAN TROUPE-5

The Greatest Troupe of Gymnasts of the Age.

Programme continued on second page following

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MacDonough  
~~Theater~~  
opening  
special  
section

11-14-1892